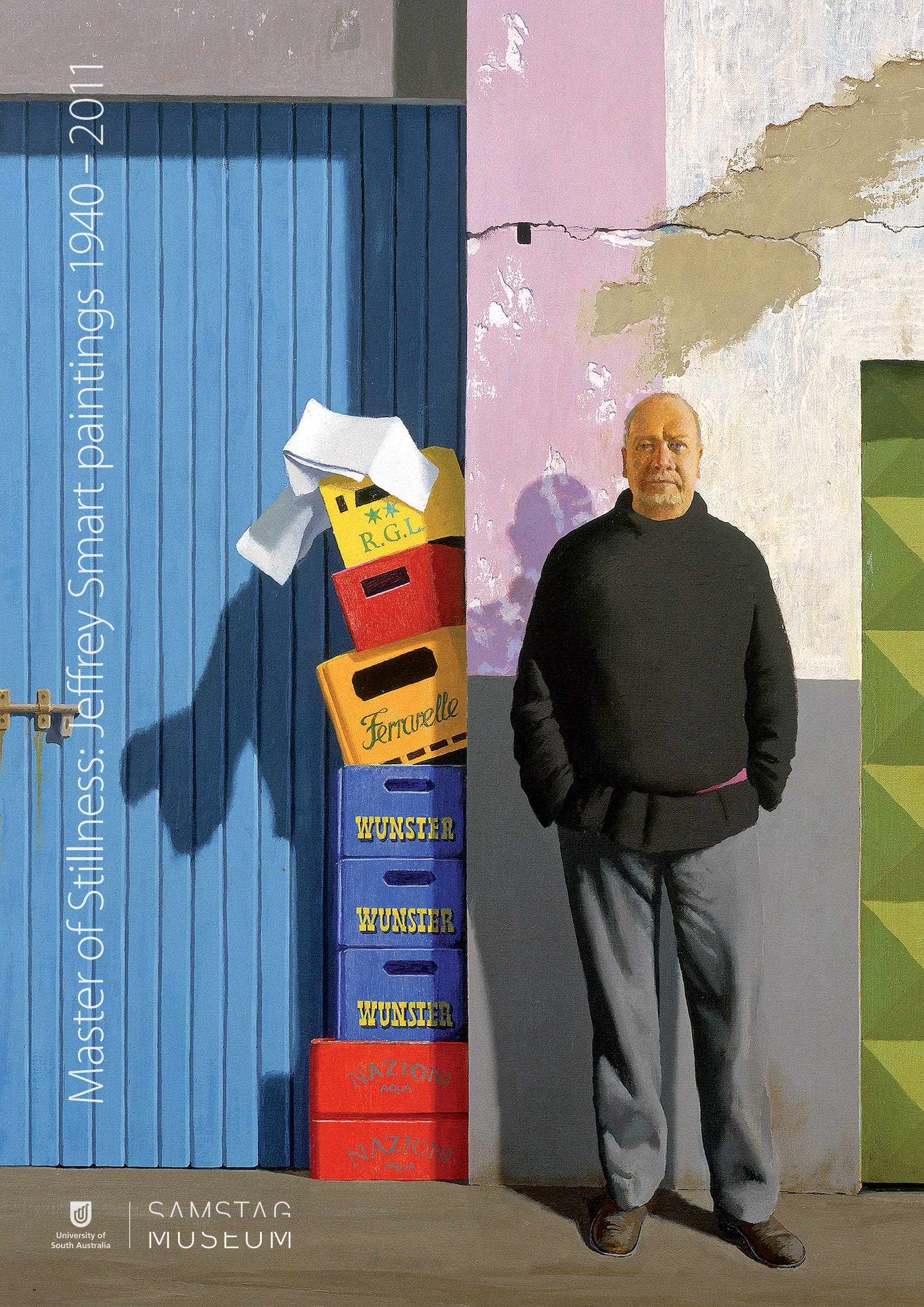


Master of Stillness: Jeffrey Smart paintings 1940 - 2011



Acknowledgements

Master of Stillness: Jeffrey Smart paintings 1940–2011 is a Samstag Museum of Art and Carrick Hill exhibition in partnership with TarraWarra Museum of Art

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oil and acrylic on canvas, 85.0 x 115.0 cm, private collection, © Jeffrey Smart



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Master of Stillness: Jeffrey Smart paintings 1940 – 2011

Education briefing notes

About this Education Resource

This Education Resource is published to accompany the exhibition
Master of Stillness: Jeffrey Smart paintings 1940–2011

12 October – 14 December 2012
Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, Adelaide

10 October 2012 – 24 February 2013
Carrick Hill, Adelaide

21 December 2012 – 31 March 2013
TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healesville

This Education Resource is designed to support learning outcomes and teaching programs associated with viewing the exhibition *Master of Stillness* at the Samstag Museum by:

- Providing information about the artist
- Providing information about key works
- Challenging students to engage with the works and the exhibition's themes
- Identifying ways in which the exhibition can be used as a curriculum resource
- Providing strategies for exhibition viewing, as well as pre- and post-visit research

It may be used in conjunction with a visit to the exhibition or as a pre-visit or post-visit resource.

Year level

This Education Resource is primarily designed to be used by secondary to senior secondary visual art teachers and students. Components can be adapted for use by upper primary and tertiary students.

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1 Background briefing

Internationally acclaimed expatriate South Australian artist Jeffrey Smart is one of Australia's most important living painters. Smart is regarded as Australia's iconic master of the urban vision – his works feature industrial wastelands and concrete streetscapes with precise attention to clean lines, composition and geometry.

This major exhibition draws on a large range of works from Smart's oeuvre, to illuminate the consistent artistic and technical qualities that animate his art, and to reveal the sustained vision that has deservedly grown his reputation over several decades.

About the artist

Jeffrey Smart was born in Adelaide in 1921, studied at Adelaide Teachers College and South Australian School of Arts and Crafts from 1939–1941 and took up a teaching appointment at Goodwood Boys Technical School in 1942. He also taught part-time at School of Arts and Crafts 1945–47. Smart travelled to Europe in 1948 and studied in Paris in 1949 with the artist Fernand Léger. He returned to Australia in 1950, moved from Adelaide to Sydney in 1951 and variously worked as an art critic for the Daily Telegraph, an arts compere for the ABC children's radio program the Argonauts Club and, from 1962, as a life drawing teacher at East Sydney Technical College. In 1964 he relocated to Italy and has lived and worked there as an artist to the present day. He has held numerous solo exhibitions and his works have been included in international exhibitions in London. Smart is represented in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, all state galleries, several regional galleries and internationally by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In 1999 the Art Gallery of New South Wales held a major retrospective of his work.

Key influences and development

Modernism

Modernism is a term used to describe a group of values, philosophies and art/design/architectural practices associated with modern art and ideas about change and progress. The origins of modernism are located in Paris in the mid 19th century and are linked to the poet and writer Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) who held that art must change because the experience of life itself changes. Art historians trace a line of progression in modernism from Impressionism to the Post Impressionist artists (particularly Paul Cézanne, Georges Seurat, Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin) and then, in the early 20th century, to more radical art practice associated with the emergence of Cubism and expressionist and constructivist movements across Europe, prior to the First World War.

A later understanding, and usage of the term 'modern art' is associated with the ideas of the American visual art critic Clement Greenberg (1909–1994) who saw modernism as a continuous process or tradition of pictorial refinement (which can be traced back through European art) that denied art's traditional roles of naturalistic representation, narrative and political critique. On this basis Greenberg was a powerful advocate of Abstract Expressionist painting.

Australia was largely isolated from the debates and experiments associated with modern art until the 1930s. By this time the art and wider communities of the capital cities (including Adelaide) had polarised into groups which either supported modernism or regarded it as 'dangerous', 'morally corrupt' or 'politically motivated'. Generally speaking, when young Australian artists of the 1930s and 1940s began to experiment with modernism, they favoured modified forms of Expressionism, Surrealism and Cubism. Cubism offered the additional reassurance of being anchored to the world of appearances while continuing to explore concepts of 'timeless form' and 'underlying structure' which could be traced to the work and ideas of French painter Paul Cézanne.

Smart and modernism

Early art training introduced Smart to methodical ways of working and to styles of Cubist composition. The French-trained Australian Marie Tuck (1866–1947) who taught at the South Australian School of Arts and Crafts, instructed Smart in a method of laying out his painting palette so that it could be used like an instrument. A significant influence on his early development was the Adelaide-born artist Dorrit Black (1891–1951) who in the 1920s had studied at the Grosvenor School of Modern Art in London, then at André Lhote's academy in Paris and at his summer school, and had worked briefly with another modernist artist Albert Gleizes in 1929. A disciple of Cubism, Black returned to Sydney where she conducted the Modern Art Centre from 1931–33. On her return to Adelaide in the mid 1930s, Black continued to teach, became deeply involved in the local art scene and was a key figure in the formation of the South Australian branch of the Contemporary Art Society of Australia. The *Master of Stillness* exhibition curator Barry Pearce has pointed out that Black's key philosophy was that a painting was something to be made or designed rather than be regarded as a representation of the thing seen (such as a landscape, portrait or still life). Smart later recalled that Black taught her students to "examine the bare bones of composition". He was also impressed by Black's accommodation with the art of the past which included using the Golden Mean to analyse compositions by artists including Nicolas Poussin, Leonardo da Vinci and others.

Smart, through his active participation in the establishment of the Contemporary Art Society in South Australia was exposed to a wide spectrum of ideas and styles associated with European modernism. An early influence on his work would appear to be that of the Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico whose work Smart would have seen in the touring exhibition, *French and British Contemporary Art* at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 1939. A more significant and lasting influence was the work of Dorrit Black and Paul Cézanne.

Adelaide art historian Jane Hylton has observed that "Smart adapted Black's technique of compositional construction to his own structured paintings, in which the representational elements have tremendous visual tension".

J. Hylton, *Adelaide Angries: South Australian painting of the 1940s*, Art Gallery Board of South Australia, 1989, p.28.

In addition to Cézanne, Smart also studied the work of Fernand Léger, Pablo Picasso and Piet Mondrian. The artist was also familiar with the Hayward collection of art at Carrick Hill, which included paintings and sculptures by modern Australian, British and French artists.

Two modernist realist artists who have had a significant impact on Smart's paintings are Canadian artist Alex Colville (born 1920) and the American Edward Hopper (1882–1967).

The following are descriptions of these artists' work and style:

Painter, draughtsman, engraver and muralist, Alex Colville has always remained aloof from the formal trends that characterised the 20th century. Drawing his inspiration from the world around him, from the most repetitive gestures of everyday life, he places his unsettling juxtapositions of figures, objects and animals in an ambiguous atmosphere of disquieting tranquility, as though time were suspended. His compositions are rigorously constructed according to a precise geometry and executed with a technique that consists of minuscule dabs of paint applied meticulously dot by dot.

National Gallery of Canada: www.gallery.ca/en/see/collections/artist.php?iartistid=1087

Hopper depicted his favoured subjects – cityscapes, landscapes, and room interiors – solemnly, in carefully composed compositions that seem timeless and frozen but are animated by the effects of natural and man-made light. As fellow painter Charles Burchfield wrote for the catalogue of the Museum of Modern Art's 1933 Hopper retrospective: "Hopper's viewpoint is essentially classic; he presents his subjects without sentiment, propaganda, or theatrics. He is the pure painter, interested in his material for its own sake, and in the exploitation of his idea of form, color, and space division."

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/210009492>

Smart has continued to be inspired by the work of the Early Renaissance artist Piero della Francesca (1416/17 – 1492) and in particular by his late c.1455 painting *The Flagellation*. Della Francesca's fascination with geometry and mathematics instilled in his imagery a sense of compositional detachment from the subject depicted. This 'abstracted' quality was admired by various early 20th century modernist artists.

Literature

Poetry and literature in general inspired generations of modernist artists. Artists of the immediate post World War Two era, for example, identified with the existentialist writings of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre as a way of coming to terms with the war's legacy of nihilism and despair. Smart was drawn to the poetry of the writer and playwright T.S. Eliot (1888 – 1965) whose poems, including *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915) and *The Waste Land* (1922), spoke for the disillusionment of a post-war generation. Some observers see a strong relationship between Eliot's evocation of a world which has lost its human heart and Smart's lonely figures adrift in urban 'wastelands'. Pearce has identified a connection between Eliot's evocation of wastelands and vacant lots and Smart's hometown of Adelaide with its grid-layout, neat perspectives and buildings lit by strong, clear light.

Consider the following exchange between the artist and ABC media interviewer Peter Thompson:

Peter Thompson: T.S. Eliot.

Jeffrey Smart: Yes. Wonderful man.

Peter Thompson: With his poetry, you really found a friend.

Jeffrey Smart: Yes, yes. I mean, I was interested in poetry anyway. And the images were not about daffodils and roses in the spring, it was about vacant lots and suburban houses, slummy corridors – ordinary, ordinary things, made into great poetry. He was a brilliant man.

Peter Thompson: What lines do you recall that especially moved you?

Jeffrey Smart: Oh, one of the lines in... in the fourth one. "Words move, music moves, but only in time. That which is only living can only die. Words after speech reach into the silence as a Chinese jar still moves perpetually in its stillness." Then he goes on to correct, "not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts." And then he talks about "the stillness of a work of art". And that's so crucial. And if you find that in a work of art, like Cézanne, it's that perfect stillness. And I hope I get it sometimes in my own work.

ABC *Talking Heads with Peter Thompson*. Extract from transcript of interview with Jeffrey Smart, screened 23 June 2008, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/talkingheads/txt/s2275731.htm>

Key imagery

Early works: 1940 – 1951

Smart wanted to be an architect and throughout his life has continued to be inspired by the built environment. Early paintings were derived from observations of various structures and buildings. They reveal the influence of his teachers, particularly Australian artist Ivor Hele, in the build of the image from thin washes overlaid by impasto touches.

Echoes of the poet T.S. Eliot's 'wastelands' can be found in a number of Smart's early 1940s works including *Port Adelaide railway station* (1944), *Water towers* (1944) and *Keswick siding* (1945). This style of interpretation also characterised paintings based on rural and coastal and mining town subjects in which features such as buildings, headlands and obelisks are set in stark contrast to their surrounds. A complementary feature is the handling of light to consolidate compositions with dramatic contrasts between bright highlights and deep shadows.

Sydney: 1951 – 1963

A significant aspect of paintings made while Smart was working in Sydney is the more obvious presence of figures within architectural settings. In addition the artist began to explore compositional options created by selective viewpoints, which controlled the way the viewer 'entered' and moved within the image. This includes cinematic-type techniques of cropping objects to create an impression of moving in on the subject or scene. Adding to this mix are enigmatic (mysterious) clues to a possible story offered by strategically placed figures and objects. Smart's trademark use of signage and road marking to invite the viewer to engage in some kind of visual game emerges at this time. Other stylistic signifiers include the use of dark skies to provide a dramatic backdrop to the action.

Rome 1964 – 1971

At the end of 1963 Smart left Australia for what proved to be a life of permanent expatriation. While he continued to return to Australia, his domestic and working life from this point on has been defined by extensive travelling and exhibiting. The pared-down style of subject selection and pictorial strategies which Smart had developed while in Australia continued to be applied to subjects and settings as the artist familiarised himself with his new surroundings. Living for a time in a semi-industrial area on the outskirts of Rome offered a wealth of material including the autostradas, traffic, apartment blocks and 'wastelands' created by urban and industrial sprawl. Many of Smart's best-known images, that of figures seemingly cast adrift in soulless or dreamlike precincts, emerge during this period.

Tuscany 1971 – 2012

In 1971 Smart purchased a farmhouse, Posticcia Nuova, near Arezzo in Tuscany, Italy. This property became his home and studio and is to the present day. Smart has continued to travel and exhibit extensively and his work extends well established routines to explore the capacity of painting to capture moments in time as seen through a filter of carefully composed urban scenarios. These include subjects drawn from local settings as well as 'moments seized' while travelling, by foot, car or plane. Friends and some visitors to Posticcia Nuova, including actor Barry Humphries and his wife Lizzie, the artist Margaret Olley, the writers Germaine Greer, Clive James and David Malouf and the film director Bruce Beresford have been portrait subjects or are 'extras' in one of Smart's paintings. From the early 1970s the architectonic character of Smart's imagery took on an increasingly bolder style as buildings, industrial structures and signage stretched and swelled to dominate compositions. A very recent work, an image based on a maze in an English garden, encapsulates in its pared-down realism and interlocking geometrics, the essence of the artist's mature style and priorities.

Meet the artist

Working as an artist

"They wanted me to speak more about myself and how I worked. This is just impossible, it would be like telling an audience how you make love and why. I think some things are ineffable, and that is one. I also feel that if you talk about 'inspiration' it will offend the Holy Ghost, or whoever it is who helps us."

Jeffrey Smart letter to Barry Pearce, 8 July 1982.

"I like living in the 20th century – to me the world has never been more beautiful. I am trying to paint the real world I live in, as beautiful as I can, with my own eye."

"My attraction to urban life, factories, trucks and vacant lots came in my early 20s when I decided that I had painted my last billabong scene forever."

Jeffrey Smart quoted in Hawley, Janet, 'A bent for writing', *Sydney Morning Herald Spectrum*, 17 August 1996.

"It is no use waiting about for inspiration. An artist has to work, work, work when he does not wish to work, and sometimes pursue and flog a dead painting, knowing all the time that it will be discarded. But he knows that by the act of painting, he is placing himself in a position where something may turn up."

"The reason I paint is simply because I love painting. Other people like making money or driving fast cars but if I haven't got a picture to paint, I'm miserable."

Jeffrey Smart quoted in Capon, Edmund, Pearce, Barry and Quartermaine, Peter, *Jeffrey Smart Retrospective*, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales 1999, p.110.

Sources of ideas and images

"Sometimes I'll drive around for months ... despair, nothing, nothing, then suddenly I will see something that seizes me: a shape, a combination of shapes, a play of light or shadows and I send up a prayer because I know I have a germ of a picture."

Jeffrey Smart quoted in Hawley, Janet, *Encounters with Australian Artists*, University of Queensland Press 1993

"And then in a plane one day coming from India, I saw a woman doing embroidery – some tapestry work. She was doing all the squares and I thought 'Oh well this is what I should be doing all the time'. I couldn't wait to get home. I got home and started putting it all together."

Jeffrey Smart talking about an event which led to the painting *Truck and trailer approaching a city* (1973) quoted in Pearce, Barry, *Jeffrey Smart*, Sydney: The Beagle Press 2005 and 2011, p.122.

"I painted a wonderful pile of different coloured oil drums (*The oil drums*, 1992) I saw in Italy, but didn't have the right figure to go with them. Then I remembered years ago in Sydney, at 5am one morning being woken by a man playing a trumpet – and watching him out the window, serenading the dawn across the harbour after a late party."

Jeffrey Smart quoted in *Jeffrey Smart Retrospective* Education Kit, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1999.

Subject

"The subject matter is only the hinge that opens the door, the hook on which hangs my coat. My only concern is putting the right shapes in the right colours in the right places. It is always the geometry."

Jeffrey Smart to Sandra McGrath, 'Jeffrey Smart', *Art International* XX1/1, Zurich, Jan – Feb 1977, p.17.

Composition

"My pictures are completely synthetic, in that I move things around restlessly, change the heights of buildings, the colours, to get the composition right."

Jeffrey Smart quoted in Capon, Edmund, Pearce, Barry and Quartermaine, Peter, *Jeffrey Smart Retrospective*, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales 1999, p.178

One of Smart's paintings (not included in *Master of Stillness* exhibition), *Truck and trailer approaching a city* (1973), features the rear view of a truck moving towards some distant apartment blocks. The artist's comments suggest that it was the composition not the scene that had priority:

"The painting is in two squares. I wanted to see if I could bring off a satisfactory composition which had a line down the centre, dividing it into two equal parts ... This is the first painting in which the apartment houses have that really impersonal quality I see in them ... I have been able to give them the grid look, amazingly similar to the pattern of memory cells in a computer. The sky is painted mainly with raw umber and mauve – with so much red, a neutral area was absolutely necessary."

Jeffrey Smart, artist comments in 1999 on *Truck and trailer approaching a city*, 1973, Art Gallery of New South Wales collection notes: <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/work/1.1980/>

"You should be able to work on a picture for a month. In a symphony you are organising the time from beginning to end. The composer spends a long time composing it; artists should spend a long time composing their pictures in the same way."

Michael Shmith, 'Taking pleasure in being Smart', *The Age*, 3 October 1987

Figures

"The truth is, I put figures in mainly for scale ... You have to be very careful because as soon as you put a figure in a painting the viewer's eye goes straight to it, like a magnet. So I try not to make them too interesting; they are never beautiful or sexy."

Jeffrey Smart quoted in Capon, Edmund, Pearce, Barry and Quartermaine, Peter, *Jeffrey Smart Retrospective*, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales 1999, p.92

Reasons why

When asked why his skies are always so gloomy and smog-laden or why his faces never wear a smile, Smart has commented, "I need a dark sky for the composition, because the pale blue at the top of the frame loses nothing ... (and) because a smiling face is too hard to paint."

Jeffrey Smart quoted in McDonald, John, *Jeffrey Smart: Paintings of the '70s and '80s*, Sydney: Craftsman House, 1990.

Consider the following exchange between Jeffrey Smart and ABC media interviewer Peter Thompson:

Peter Thompson: One of the amusing things about you is that you're famed for your art, but you're famously reluctant to talk about it.

Jeffrey Smart: It's painting. I mean, it's visual things, and ... Sometimes I lead people astray by making up stories ... about the pictures.

Peter Thompson: Well, let's talk about this one for a moment. Now, what about the truck? What's the significance of the orange on the truck?

Jeffrey Smart: I just needed a bit of colour over there. But see, I work on the basis that the eye, because we read, we're accustomed to reading all the time, our eyes go from left to right, left to right, left to right, always. So I always have something for the eye to start with on the left there, bring it across, and then something to bring it back again.

ABC Talking Heads with Peter Thompson. Extract from transcript of interview with Jeffrey Smart, screened 23 June 2008, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/talkingheads/txt/s2275731.htm>

"Sometimes the feeling is not so much visual. Sometimes it's a feeling about a certain place or area of Rome or Florence, or the country where there is a garage; there's a feeling there that I like. I start thinking and doing little drawings and what I assimilate comes out in paint."

Jeffrey Smart quoted in Capon, Edmund, Pearce, Barry and Quartermaine, Peter, *Jeffrey Smart Retrospective*, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales 1999, p.184

Critical insights

Are Smart's paintings social commentaries? Here is one opinion that suggests otherwise:

"The argument that Jeffrey Smart's paintings are somehow commentaries on society alienated by technology, or a world impoverished by mass-produced architecture, is not quite to the mark. His paintings are, at the end of the day, expressions of himself. Container trucks which pollute cities, highways which have displaced communities, and modularised buildings which have absolved individuals from caring about each other, are not in themselves beautiful. They cannot be, except that from the tranquility of his eighteenth century farm in Tuscany he has made them beautiful by extracting time and noise and pain."

Barry Pearce, 'Out of Adelaide', in Capon, Edmund, Pearce, Barry and Quartermaine, Peter, *Jeffrey Smart Retrospective*, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales 1999, p.32

Do you agree with this interpretation?

Is Smart a realist artist?

Consider the following opinion of art critic Christopher Allen:

"The immediate point is that there is nothing simple or straightforward about the apparent 'realism' of his (Smart's) pictures. They are all conceived with the greatest care, as abstract compositions of volumes and lines, as two dimensional designs."

Allen, Christopher, *Jeffrey Smart: Unpublished Paintings 1940 – 2007*, Collingwood, Vic: Australian Galleries, 2008.

With the above comment in mind how would you describe the realism in Smart's work?

2 Exploring the exhibition: Themes

Theme 1: The city

Jeffrey Smart states that ultimately his art is about looking at the world around him and finding in painting a way of capturing the essence of what he finds interesting. While keeping this in mind many who look at his paintings are attracted to images which appear to be making some statement about what it means to live in contemporary urbanised environments.

Smart states that the people who he inserts into his images are essentially pictorial devices used to define a sense of scale or to lead the eye somewhere. While all this may be uppermost in the artist's mind and intentions it is inevitable that viewers will want to speculate about the places and human dramas which are captured within his images. In doing so many choose to see Smart's paintings as making some comment on the human condition as defined by the city and urban development.

To explore Smart's work through the thematic filter of 'the city' it is useful to consider key elements and strategies used by the artist. These include:

- a single, isolated figure within an architectural setting
- figures dwarfed by emblems of technology, buildings and machinery
- contemporary buildings (such as apartment blocks) set on the edge of rural countryside
- creating environments overrun by signs
- tower and communications structures implying surveillance
- using dark skies and dramatic lighting to build an atmosphere of mystery and suspense
- odd conjunctions of objects and activities
- contrasting the new and old



Central Station II, 1974–75, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 86.0 x 100.0 cm, purchased 1976, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Example: *Central Station II*, 1974–75

Consider in this work:

- the clock tower rising high against a dark sky to suggest some kind of overview of the whole scene
- the implied drama of a figure running away
- signs imposing conditions on entry to the site
- very dramatic low lighting creating foreground shadows which may carry a note of menace

Exploring *Central Station II*

If, as the artist states, everything is serving the needs of the image, analyse this work in terms of its composition, particularly the placement of the key elements (such as the fencing and buildings) in relation to each other.

- Analyse the artist's approach to using highlights and shadows.
- Can you identify any plan or system at work in the use of colour within this picture?
- Make up/write a short story which in some way includes this scene.

Studio

Smart has stated that he makes art about the world he lives in. Consider this as a starting point for a series of works. You may for example decide to keep a visual, daily diary of things that catch your attention and use this material as a starting point for some studio work.

Further research

The city as subject has a long tradition in Western art. A number of well-known 'city-subject' works include:

- Canaletto, *Piazza San Marco*, late 1720s
- Camille Pissarro, *The Boulevard Montmartre on a Winter Morning*, 1897
- Tom Roberts, *Allegro con brio: Bourke Street west*, c.1886
- Fernand Léger, *The City*, 1919
- John Brack, *Collins Street, 5pm*, 1955
- Edward Hopper, *Office in a Small City*, 1953
- Jon Cattapan, *The acid bath*, 1994

Research two or three of these works (or similar subject works) by these artists and consider how each has responded to and interpreted city subjects.

Theme 2: Contemporary life

Despite the artist stating that the figures within his painting are primarily included to serve the needs of the composition many viewers continue to interpret his art as having something to say about modern society and the human condition in general. This means that the kinds of people he depicts and the circumstances in which they are cast by the artist trigger readings, which confirm or invite speculation about the effect of modernisation on ordinary people. With Smart's 'figures in the landscape' there seems always to be some ambiguity or question mark about the inner thoughts of individuals or the fate of whole classes of people.

This ability to suggest without telling is a rare talent that Smart shares with a number of other artists and is something you may care to explore.



Approach to a city III, 1968–69, oil on canvas, 66.0 x 80.0 cm, private collection

Example: *Approach to a city III*, 1968–69

Consider

- The invitation to guess why this couple is walking along the edge of the highway.
- Why are they walking and not riding in a bus, car or taxi?
- Have they come from the apartments to the right of the overpass?
- If so, is there some compelling reason for them to be walking away?
- Would it make much of a difference to this picture if the figures were placed elsewhere within the composition or removed altogether?
- How in other works the figures are staring at something. Check this out and consider what effect this has on your reading of these works.

Studio

It is likely that Smart saw something, which led to the creation of this image. From your visual diary (see 'Exploring *Central Station II*') select an image and see if you can create a strong narrative element by manipulating the visual components of composition, colour and lighting then adding a human element.

Further research

See if you can find other examples of paintings in which a story is suggested but invites the viewer to 'fill in the details'.

You may find the following selection of artists a useful starting point in your research:

Johannes Vermeer, Walter Sickert, Anne Wallace, Edward Hopper, Alex Colville, Bill Viola, Jeff Wall.

Theme 3: The art of stillness

Curator, Barry Pearce, describes how Smart's distinctive style and philosophy developed. Early training opened his eyes to the 'hidden geometry' of art and a way of looking at the world analytically to see the patterns and structures that underlie the world of appearances. To this training was added encounters with a variety of artist's work including Cézanne and Léger. Travel to Europe and Italy in particular allowed him to experience and study works at first hand. One reason for Smart to buy a property and establish a studio near Arezzo was that the Church of San Francesco in that city contained the great fresco cycle *The legend of the true cross* by the Quattrocento artist Piero della Francesca, a work which has continued to inspire Smart throughout his life.

Close by were also other works by della Francesca, *The Resurrection* in Sansepolcro and *The Flagellation of Christ* in Urbino which is Smart's favourite painting. He comments, "It's almost perfectly designed". Della Francesca, along with other early Renaissance artists, came to be regarded as 'proto-moderns' in the modern era on account of the priority given in their art to rational and structured compositions. One of the best-known works to emerge from the Post Impressionist period, Georges Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884–1886) incorporates the influence of della Francesca courtesy of reproductions of the Arezzo frescoes Seurat encountered in Paris.

Stillness for Smart, in Pearce's estimation, is that moment when the calibrations, which "depend not only on proportion, scale, shape and colour, but also the appropriate angle of the sun, are right".

Consider the following extract from Pearce's catalogue essay:

"The moment of stillness for Smart has always been to some extent determined by a celestial light which, through the cycle of seasons and the turning of the planet, rearranges the shapes of what we see beyond our control ... there is no doubt Smart found through his long and persistent career an ideal meeting point between created and revealed; as the Australian poet A.D. Hope once wrote, paraphrasing the French writer André Gide: 'There is always in genuine poetry ... an element of finding, something that cannot be planned or predicted but has to be waited for and "found out"'. "

Barry Pearce, 'Search for the timeless', *Master of Stillness: Jeffrey Smart paintings 1940 – 2011*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2012, p.21



Portrait of David Malouf, 1980, oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 100.0 x 100.0 cm, purchased 1983, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

Example: *Portrait of David Malouf*, 1980

Consider

This portrait implies that the Australian writer David Malouf has an alternative career as a workman, feeding cable or pumping out drains and the like. This is an amusing fiction but with Smart's sense of humour it might be worth wondering if he sees a link between writing and pumping or siphoning – perhaps filling people's heads with ideas. With this in mind perhaps the trucks in the background are referencing books stacked in a library shelf.

The hose inserted into the hole is not connected and may be sucking in air – or nothing?

Look at the way Smart has aligned the top of Malouf's head with the vertical line of windows. One possible reading is that the windows resemble thought bubbles. The word 'OVIDIO' on the side of the building references a book by Malouf titled *An Imaginary Life*. See what your research can tell you about this connection.

Now consider the style of representation. All objects within this scene are clearly identified in a strongly illusionist manner. The strong light coming from the left models the forms through controlled transitions from highlights to shadows.

But, despite the realism the overall scene looks slightly unreal – or as some observers say – hyper real. This sense of unreality, which can be found in most of Smart's images, is a result of the artist exercising control over all the visual elements. In this painting the foreground on which the figure is standing and the dark sky in the background are devoid of distracting details. This 'blankness' allows all other items such as the figure, hose, tracks and buildings to read in terms of how they visually relate to one another. Viewed in this way the figure combines with the building to create a vertical element, which crosses at right angles the horizontal line, created by the neatly parked trucks. So we have a cruciform composition which is given added interest by the looping curvature of the hose, exercising freedom like the thoughts in a writer's head.

Keeping this in mind, now find images of two works; della Francesca's *The Flagellation* and Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon*. While looking at and comparing these three images consider this concept of 'stillness' and how each artist has balanced observing the world while creating an original image.

Studio

From your visual diary of everyday events and scenes select one and through manipulation of visual elements see if you can give it the 'stillness' treatment.

Further research

Look at the work of a number of artists who have explored this balance between observing and creating/imagining as a means of revealing some truth about existence.

Smart was introduced to the Golden Mean by Dorrit Black. See what you can find out about this and apply this research to an analysis of some of Smart's works.

Researching artists:

Della Francesca and Seurat are good starting points.

Others are mentioned elsewhere in this resource including: Johannes Vermeer, Edward Hopper, Alex Colville, Bill Viola, Jeff Wall.

See also works by: Rick Amor, Christopher Orchard, Paula Rego, Giorgio de Chirico, Vilhelm Hammershøi.

3 For teachers

Planning a successful group visit to *Master of Stillness: Jeffrey Smart paintings 1940–2011*

If planning to bring a group to this exhibition – BOOK NOW.

Numbers are restricted in some video projection areas. Booked groups will have priority, scheduled entry to the exhibition.

To book:

T 08 8302 0870

E samstagmuseum@unisa.edu.au

W unisa.edu.au/samstagmuseum

All bookings will be confirmed by email with the supervising teacher/lecturer/group organiser.

Year Level

The Education Resource is designed to be used by secondary, senior secondary and tertiary visual art students.

Pre-exhibition

Inform the students about the origins and content of the exhibition.

Refer to the 'Background Briefing' notes for this Education Resource.

Access the Education Resource from the Samstag Museum of Art website.

In the exhibition

On arrival your group will be met and welcomed by a member of the Samstag Museum of Art staff.

Consider organising the class as smaller, independent viewing groups and task these groups before dispersing within the exhibition. To facilitate structured viewing consider using the 'Get Started' research activities included in this Education Resource.

Before groups disperse remind students of the usual gallery viewing protocols (such as being aware of others using the space) and to stress the nature of viewing this kind of exhibition, which will require students to spend reflective time with works. This is particularly relevant to looking at Smart's imagery in which subtle and complex visual relationships are embedded.

This session will likely involve students being involved in some group and individual analysis and response. Scribing is optional but will be useful for on-site reporting and post-visit research.

A suggestion is that students in this session try a few things: engage with a few works which hold personal interest, look at a selection of works to get an idea of the diversity of Smart's practice and explore one of the exhibition's themes.

For this to happen it would be useful if the students had access to the Education Resource prior to visiting the exhibition. This could allow students to make a thematic selection before arrival.

Post-visit

Post-visit options primarily consist of sharing and analysing the information gathered during the exhibition visit. This information might be:

- Information gathered on-site
- Individual opinions (shared)
- Different task or theme groups reporting findings

4 Get started

In-exhibition engagement activities

The following tasks are designed to support/initiate structured viewing and engagement for students in the exhibition. They can be undertaken in any order and are suitable for individual and small group work. Implicit in some tasks is the idea that students or groups will report findings and discuss works with others.

Scribing is not necessary to undertake these activities but some of these tasks could involve scribing to support on-going post-visit work.

First and last impressions

- What did you think about when you first came into the exhibition and looked around?
- Was there any work in particular you wanted to return to and look at again?
- Are there any reasons for this?
- Is there a work in this exhibition that you think you will find hard to forget? Why?
- Is there one work here that has challenged you in any way? Look at it again before you leave and consider why this is so.
- Select one work from this exhibition that most resembles (or contains things) from your world or local area.
- Before leaving check out the exhibition one more time to see if there's an idea or technique in a work that you could try when you get back to school.

Engagement

Choose any work that attracts your attention and apply any or all of the following questions:

- Could this idea have been better expressed in a different way?
- Can you see any kind of connection between this kind of art and others you know about?
- What do you think this work is about or might be saying?

Select one work that appeals in some way and see if someone else in your group can correctly identify the reasons for your selection.

Response (engaging with critical insights)

The artist has stated:

"My pictures are completely synthetic, in that I move things around restlessly, change the heights of buildings, the colours to get the composition right."

Jeffrey Smart quoted in *Jeffrey Smart Retrospective* Education Kit, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1999

Select and analyse one of Smart's work from this perspective.

Writer and curator Timothy Morrell has said that Smart has:

"dedicated a long career to perfecting his technique of capturing the mysterious with the mundane."

What do you think Morrell means by this? Can you find some good examples of this in the exhibition?

Timothy Morrell, catalogue essay, *Jeffrey Smart* exhibition, Philip Bacon Galleries 2006, Brisbane
<http://www.artnomad.com.au/artists/artist.cfm?id=1065>

Bruce Beresford, film director and friend of Smart, has said:

"He (Smart) saw beauty in highways, buildings, road signs, factories and so on just as the Heidelberg school had seen it in the rustic Australia of their time, or the Impressionists, who painted the France which was a part of their everyday lives."

How is it possible to see beauty in industrial things such as roads, signs and traffic? Analyse and discuss particular work/s from this perspective.

Bruce Beresford, 'Jeffrey Smart – Australian Painter', http://bruceberesford.org/?page_id=184

Art historian and critic Christopher Allen has written:

"One may even detect in the unquiet skies of some of these pictures a sense that the world of nature, apparently almost extinguished, is threatening revenge. But it would be a mistake to make Smart's work sound angry or censorious. In the end, even when the sky is darkening with an approaching storm, Jeffrey Smart's work remains bathed in a cool light of unfathomable irony and silent detachment."

What do you think Allen means by this statement?

Is it in any way useful in interpreting Smart's paintings?

Extract from 2005 exhibition catalogue Philip Bacon Galleries

http://www.philipbacongalleries.com.au/artists_and_stockroom?id=452529

The exhibition is titled *Master of Stillness: Jeffrey Smart paintings 1940 – 2011*.

Having viewed the exhibition can you understand why this title was chosen?

Can you think of an alternative?

Extended writing/research tasks

Write a review of the exhibition that explores the links or relationships between the works.

Choose one of the themes ('The city', 'Contemporary life', 'The art of stillness') suggested in this Education Resource and review the exhibition from this perspective.

Compare two or more works which appear to be exploring similar ideas in different ways.

5 Further research

Books and catalogues

- Aland, Jenny and Darby, Max, *Australian Artlook*, Port Melbourne: Heinemann 1997, pp.134–135
- Allen, Christopher, *Art in Australia: From colonisation to postmodernism*, London: Thames & Hudson 1997, pp.170–171
- Allen, Christopher, *Jeffrey Smart: Unpublished Paintings 1940 – 2007*, Collingwood, Vic: Australian Galleries 2008
- Beresford, Bruce, 'Smart', in *Jeffrey Smart: Paintings and studies 2006 – 2010 and one drawing from 1946*, Collingwood, Vic: Australian Galleries 2010 (exhibition catalogue)
- Capon, Edmund, Pearce, Barry and Quartermaine, Peter, *Jeffrey Smart Retrospective*, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales 1999
- Capon, Edmund and Smart, Jeffrey, *Jeffrey Smart: Drawings and studies 1942 – 2001*, Collingwood, Vic: Australian Galleries in association with Jeffrey Smart and Australian Art Publishing 2001
- De Groen, Geoffrey, *Some Other Dream: The artist, the art world and the expatriate*, Sydney: Hale & Iremonger 1984 (edited version in 'Where the light must rule', *Art & Australia*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1981)
- Gray, Anne (ed.), *Australian Art in the National Gallery of Australia*, Canberra: National Gallery of Australia 2002, pp.16, 258, 311
- Greer, Germaine, *Jeffrey Smart*, Brisbane: Philip Bacon Galleries 1996 (exhibition catalogue)
- Grishin, Sasha, 'Jeffrey Smart's eternal order of light and balance', in *Jeffrey Smart: Paintings and studies 2002 – 2003*, Melbourne: Australian Galleries 2003
- Hughes, Robert, *The Art of Australia*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1970, pp.203–204
- McDonald, John, *Jeffrey Smart: Paintings of the '70s and '80s*, Sydney: Craftsman House 1990
- Pearce, Barry, *Jeffrey Smart*, Sydney: The Beagle Press 2005
- Pearce, Barry, *Jeffrey Smart* (rev. edn), Sydney: The Beagle Press 2011
- Smart, Jeffrey, *Not Quite Straight: A memoir*, Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia 1996
- Smith, Bernard with Terry Smith and Christopher Heathcote, *Australian Painting, 1788 – 2000*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp.236, 293, 405, 415, 585, 587–8

Video interviews/articles

- Sunday Arts* ABC TV Australia 2008 interview with Jeffrey Smart
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGzY9ESglqA>
- National Gallery of Australia profile of *Corrugated Gioconda*, 1976
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQNIYCOgB9g>
- See also: YouTube videos re: Piero della Francesca, Georges Seurat and other artists referred to in this Education Resource.

6 List of works

All works by Jeffrey Smart, born 1921, Australia. Measurements are given in cms, height preceding width. Nos 1 – 24 exhibited at Carrick Hill; nos 25 – 68 at Samstag Museum of Art. With one exception (29), the paintings shown at the Samstag Museum of Art are also exhibited at the TarraWarra Museum of Art, Victoria.

Carrick Hill – The early years

Adelaide

Laundry still life, 1940

oil on canvas
40.0 x 50.0 cm
Private collection

Self portrait, 1940

oil on canvas
48.0 x 39.0 cm
Private collection

Wet street II, 1941

oil on canvas
52.5 x 40.0 cm
Private collection

Angaston, 1941

oil on canvas
45.0 x 36.0 cm
Private collection

Wet street IV, 1943

oil on canvas
28.5 x 35.0 cm
Private collection
(Smart appears to have signed this work later, inscribing 1943 with the signature.)

Hindley Street at evening, 1944

oil on canvas on board
58.5 x 49.5 cm
Private collection

Water towers, 1944

oil on canvas
61.7 x 63.5 cm
Elder Bequest Fund 1944
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
0.1274

Port Adelaide railway station, 1944

oil on canvas
50.4 x 61.0 cm
Elder Bequest Fund 1945
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
0.1288

George O'Dea in the sun, 1945

oil on canvas
37.0 x 29.0 cm
Private collection

Sunday morning service, 1945

oil on canvas
51.0 x 61.0 cm
Private collection

The wasteland II, 1945

oil on canvas
60.9 x 73.4 cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
7825

Scorched earth I, 1945

oil on board
44.5 x 53.0 cm
Private collection

Keswick siding, 1945

oil on jute canvas
62.0 x 72.0 cm
Gift of Charles B. Moses 1982
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
193.1982

Kapunda mines, 1946

oil on canvas
61.5 x 73.4 cm
Purchased, 1947
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
1711-4

Holiday resort, 1946

oil on canvas
50.9 x 60.9 cm
Gift of Douglas and Barbara Mullins
to commemorate the Gallery's 125th
anniversary 2006
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
20063P15

The salvagers, 1946

oil on canvas
51.0 x 61.0 cm
Private collection

Robe, 1947
oil on plywood
50.8 x 61.3 cm
A. R. and A. M. Ragless Bequest Fund 1975
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
757P9

Cape Dombey, 1947
oil on canvas
49.7 x 60.1 cm
Alan R. Renshaw Bequest 1976
University of Sydney Collection, Sydney
UA1976.54

The vacant allotment, 1947
oil on canvas
51.0 x 61.0 cm
New England Regional Art Museum,
Armidale 1979_104

Portrait of Judith-Anne, 1948
oil on board
42.0 x 32.0 cm
Private collection

Piazza Quirinale, Roma, 1949
gouache on paper
32.0 x 48.0 cm
Private collection
(Smart appears to have signed this work
later, inscribing it with a slightly different
title to when it was first exhibited.)

Net menders, 1950
oil on board
46.0 x 62.0 cm
Private collection

Paringa, 1951
oil on canvas
51.4 x 81.6 cm
Private collection

Wallaroo, 1951
oil on plywood
68.4 x 107.0 cm
Acquired 1959
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
NGA 59.17

Samstag Museum of Art – The later years

Sydney

Kurnell, 1955
oil on canvas
61.6 x 76.5 cm
The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art,
Perth 083

Approaching storm by railway, 1955
oil on canvas
60.2 x 73.0 cm
Private collection

The nuns' picnic, 1957
oil on canvas
34.5 x 43.0 cm
Private collection

The stilt race, c.1960
oil on plywood
56.3 x 91.3 cm
Purchased 1961
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
OA16.1961

Rushcutters Bay Baths, 1961
oil on board
56.0 x 92.0 cm
Private collection

Coogee Baths, winter, 1961
oil on canvas
91.0 x 122.0 cm
Donated through the 1976
Alan Richard Renshaw bequest
University of Sydney, Sydney UA1976.57

On the roof, Taylor Square, 1961
oil on canvas mounted on composition board
61.0 x 50.2 cm
Purchased 1969
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
NGA 69.162

Cahill Expressway, 1962
oil on plywood
81.9 x 111.3 cm
Purchased 1963
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
1306-5

Harbour excavations, Port Kembla, 1962
oil on masonite
65.3 x 127.3 cm
A.M. Ragless Bequest Fund 1963
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
0.1979

The gymnasium, 1962
oil on composition board
63.0 x 77.2 cm
Gift of Eva and Marc Besen 2001
TarraWarra Museum of Art collection,
Healesville 2002.073

Rome

San Cataldo I, 1964
oil on masonite
63.5 x 80.0 cm
National Trust of Australia (NSW) SH114

The listeners, 1965
oil on canvas
90.5 x 70.0 cm
The William, Rene and Blair Ritchie
Collection. Bequest of Blair Ritchie 1998
Ballarat Fine Art Gallery 1998.23

Madrid airport, 1965
oil on canvas
55.0 x 70.0 cm
On loan from private collection to
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Alma Mahler feeding the birds, c.1968
oil on canvas
59.8 x 70.2 cm
Bequest of Professor Emeritus Douglas
Joseph AO 1990
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
257.1990

The water tower, 1968
oil on canvas
76.0 x 91.0 cm
Private collection

Approach to a city III, 1968–69
oil on canvas
66.0 x 80.0 cm
Private collection

Rooftops, 1968–69
oil on canvas
71.6 x 100.4 cm
The Joseph Brown Collection.
Presented through the NGV Foundation
by Dr Joseph Brown AO OBE, Honorary Life
Benefactor, 2004
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
2004.219

Morning practice, Baia, 1969
oil on canvas
58.0 x 81.0 cm
Collection Mr and Mrs Dick and Barbara
Senn, California, USA

Control tower, 1969
oil on canvas
91.5 x 72.5 cm
Gift of the Friends of the Art Gallery of
South Australia 1970
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
707P13

Waiting for the train, 1969–70
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
59.0 x 89.0 cm
Gift of Alcoa World Alumina Australia 2005
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
NGA 2005.96

Holiday, 1971
oil on canvas
100.0 x 81.0 cm
Private collection

Tuscany

Factory staff, Erehwyna, 1972
oil on canvas
100.2 x 200.4 cm
Purchased 1972
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
A26-1972

Near Knossos, 1973
oil and acrylic on canvas
81.0 x 100.0 cm
University of South Australia Art Collection,
Adelaide 1976.1

The traveller, 1973
synthetic polymer paint and oil on canvas
100.5 x 116.0 cm
Purchased 1975 with the assistance of an
Australian Government Grant through the
Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane 1:1425

Central Station II, 1974–75
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
86.0 x 100.0 cm
Purchased 1976
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
241.1976

Corrugated Gioconda, 1976
oil on canvas
80.8 x 116.6 cm
Purchased 1976
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
NGA 76.1065

The directors, 1977
oil on plywood
46.5 x 209.5 cm
Acquired with funds from the Utah
Foundation 1978
Art Gallery of Western Australia 1978/00P2

The dome, 1977
oil and acrylic on canvas
74.5 x 74.4 cm
Gift of Eva and Marc Besen
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program 2008
TarraWarra Museum of Art collection,
Healesville 2008.070

The construction fence, 1978
oil and acrylic on canvas
88.5 x 228.4 cm
Gift of Eva and Marc Besen 2001,
TarraWarra Museum of Art collection,
Healesville 2002.071

Jacob descending, 1979
acrylic on canvas
94.0 x 55.6 cm
Gift of Eva and Marc Besen
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program 2008
TarraWarra Museum of Art collection,
Healesville 2008.069

Portrait of David Malouf, 1980
oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas
100.0 x 100.0 cm
Purchased 1983
Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
1983/0P13

Morning, Yarragon siding, 1983–84
oil on canvas
100.0 x 134.0 cm
Private collection

Container train in landscape, 1983–84
oil on five hardboard panels
113.5 x 985.0 cm
Commissioned in 1983. Gift of Eva
and Marc Besen, Arts Centre Melbourne,
Melbourne VAC1984-009.001

Self portrait at Papini's, 1984–85
oil and acrylic on canvas
85.0 x 115.0 cm
Private collection

Art gallery in shopping arcade, 1985
oil on canvas
80.0 x 100.0 cm
Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth 1992.044

Off Brindisi, 1985
oil and acrylic on canvas
85.0 x 104.0 cm
Private collection

The underpass, 1986–87
acrylic and oil on canvas
121.1 x 75.8 cm
Courtesy of the Parliament House Art
Collection, Department of Parliamentary
Services, Canberra 1987/0121

Portrait of Clive James, 1991–92
oil on canvas
109.0 x 120.0 cm
Purchased with funds provided by the Art
Gallery Society of New South Wales, 1992
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
276.1992

Playground at Mondragone, 1998
oil on canvas
76.0 x 111.0 cm
Gift of Australian Galleries 1998
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
347.1998

The red warehouse, 2003
oil on canvas
64.0 x 165.0 cm
Private collection

The cleaners, 2004
oil on canvas
80.0 x 110.0 cm
Private collection

The two-up game (Portrait of Hermes), 2006
oil on canvas
86.8 x 158.4 cm
Acquired 2006
TarraWarra Museum of Art collection,
Healesville 2006.011

The wooden fence, St Kilda, 2009
oil on canvas
73.0 x 70.0 cm
Private collection

Labyrinth, 2011
oil on canvas
100.0 x 100.0 cm
Private collection